



REPORT ON INSTITUTIONS' CONSTRAINTS AND SUCSESSES OF FRENCH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN LESOTHO

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Abstract:

The aim of the baseline study is to find perspectives of various institutions involved in the teaching of French language in Lesotho. The student-teachers from the National University of Lesotho who specialise in French language education failed to implement the teaching methods that they acquired theoretically during their internship program in various local schools which offer French language. They indicated that in-service teachers did not let them use the communicative approach to teach French language. As the study is interested in institutional constraints and successes of French language in various institutions, qualitative methodology was used because it allows the researcher to have the personal contact [sic] and insight, getting close to the people, the situation and the phenomenon under study (Sarantakos, 1998:47). Focus Group Discussion comprising of eight participants was used as the data collection tool while the stakeholder theory constituted the theoretical framework for the study. Findings show that all the participating institutions experienced both successes and challenges even though the latter outweighed the former. It is concluded that challenges in one institution affect operations in another in various ways hence it is recommended that stakeholders meet regularly to review their progress in relation to solutions envisaged by this study.

Keywords: community service, institutions, perspectives, constraints, successes, teaching, French language

1. Introduction

This report documents the perspectives of institutions involved in the teaching and assessment of French language in Lesotho secondary schools and institutions of higher learning. It is the product of the community service project undertaken by the staff member in the Faculty of Education at the National University of Lesotho (NUL) in the Department for Language and Social Education (LASED). The initial purpose of the

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project was to build French educators' capacity in the use of communicative approach in the teaching and learning of French Language in Lesotho secondary schools. However, due to the large scale nature of the project, the project coordinator from NUL sought financing from the French Embassy in Pretoria, South Africa. The latter was granted provided the coordinator partner with the local French institution known as the Alliance française de Maseru. Following discussions with the director of Alliance française, the project slightly changed direction from capacity building towards the baseline study. The purpose of re-directing the project objective was to establish the common ground for the teaching and learning of French language in Lesotho's institutions of formal education.

2. Context of the project

The project came to existence as a result of the teaching practice observations undertaken by the NUL staff member to monitor and evaluate students who specialize in the program called Curriculum and Teaching of French Language during the teaching practice phase of the program for the academic year 2016/2017. At the National University of Lesotho, French language is offered in two Faculties, that is the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Education. However, this project is the result of the teaching practice undertaken by the fourth year students who have enrolled in the program on Curriculum and Teaching of French language in the Faculty of Education. It is important to note that for the first two years at the university, students who have enrolled for the teaching of French language have to register for content courses in the Faculty of Humanities. These students commence their curriculum courses from their third to their fourth year of study in the Faculty of Education. During these last two years of their undergraduate program, students have to undertake the corresponding content courses in the Faculty of Humanities.

3. Statement of the problem

During the teaching practice observation in 2017, it was observed that the majority of student-teachers could not apply the methods of teaching French that they have been trained to use during their training program. The explanation for this irregularity was that practicing teachers could not let them put into practice the skills that they have learnt theoretically. The observation and the explanation highlighted a problem of implementing the teaching methods to deliver the effective teaching of French language in Lesotho secondary schools. Moreover, this indicated that most of the practicing French teachers could not put into practice the teaching methods that are prescribed by the Lesotho French syllabus for Form A, B and C. The problem in itself could not point whether the mismatch is caused by inadequate training of student-teachers and practicing teachers or their inability to transfer theory into practice. Hence, the French instructor in the Faculty of Education chose to undertake the community service project

in the area of building in-service French language teachers' capacity on the use of the communicative approach.

3.1 Justification of the project

This project is worth undertaking because it informs various stakeholders of the situation of teaching French in various institutions in Lesotho. The study serves as a reference document for researchers and policy makers who are interested in the teaching of French in this country. Moreover, it helps various institutions to take corrective measures while also envisaging solutions to some of the underlying issues that confront the effective teaching of French language in Lesotho.

3.2 Objectives of the study

1. To find underlying constraints facing institutions that offer French language in Lesotho.
2. To share experiences as stakeholders involved in French language education.
3. To reflect on challenges that faces the teaching and learning of French language in both secondary and tertiary institutions in Lesotho.
4. To recommend remedial actions towards solving some problems confronting the teaching of French language in Lesotho.

4. Methodology

The baseline study is qualitative in nature as the focus of the research was not to collect numerical information about the teaching and assessment of French language in concerned institutions; rather, the objective is to establish the situation through sharing institutional experiences about French language. The researcher chose this methodology because it gives the bigger picture of the situation of French in various institutions in Lesotho. Moreover, the descriptive nature of the presentations by various institutions helps the stakeholders to understand better the constraints and successes of institutions that are involved in one way or another in the teaching of French language in Lesotho secondary schools as well as in the institutions of higher learning. According to Sarantakos (1998:46) qualitative methodology tries to capture reality in interaction. Hence, the methodology is ideal for gathering facts and opinions about the situations of French in Lesotho from the concerned parties. In terms of the research design, the focus group discussion composed of eight participants was used. Participants were selected strategically by virtue of their affiliation to one or more of the institutions that participated in the study. This data collection tool was selected because it is interactive and enabled the researcher and participants to interact by way of asking questions and providing responses. Questions guiding the discussion were prepared by the researcher prior the data collection phase while others emerged from the interactive and purposeful conversation between participants and the researcher.

4.1 Literature review

In this part, the report looks at the related work on the university and community service. This part forms the gist of the study because it gives it the framework from which the relevance of the base line study on institutions' perspectives on constraints and successes of French language education in Lesotho can be viewed from. Moreover, the section also gives the insights on the work that has already been done in the area of community service projects as part of universities' key functions.

Community service is core to the existence of universities. According to Ifedili and Ifedili (2015:15), *"community service ... is the new method of learning...which Nigerian educationists have not been able to properly create public awareness on its importance"*. They further points out that the universities have three judicial functions which are teaching, researching and community services. Moreover, they argue that as long as the universities are located at the given community, there is need to continuously help the community in various ways. Therefore, it is not surprising that within the Department of Languages and Social Education at the National University of Lesotho, community service is amongst the core function of the Faculty of Education.

By its virtue, community service is beneficial to communities in which it is exercised. Hence, Ifedili et al (2015) posit that community service can be seen as a voluntary performance of an action by someone that will benefit his or her community. They give examples which include among others voluntary tutoring of the less privileged, organizing activities that will bring happiness to the community. These instances are very important as they highlight some of the activities which one can engage in. However, in the case of the present community service project, the major activity that was earmarked was the capacity building workshop for French educators in Lesotho. This intervention is deemed essential as it is going to enhance the teachers' approach in using various teaching methods even though the workshop in mind was mainly geared towards the use of the communicative approach in the teaching of French as the foreign language. As a result, IFedili et al (2015) affirm that community service has many benefits which are psychological, social, cognitive critical thinking and problem solving skills, political and civic awareness.

However, Graff (2006:iii) indicates that in Canada, the 2000 National Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating reported that 8% of Canadian volunteers said they were required to do so by their schools, their employers or as part of the terms of the community service order (Lasby, 2004 p10 as cited in Graff). Nonetheless, Graff (2006:6) views the mandatory forms of community service by definition to involve compulsion from the source of power outside of the person required to perform the work because punishment or denial of important rights/benefits are the consequence for those who fail to meet the service requirements. This attestation by Graff holds to an extent that in some institutions, involvement in community service can affect employee's promotion and other rewards expected by personnel such as contract renewal, training programmes, undertaking of special assignments and many more.

Ondigi (2011: 96) holds that the university is generally regarded as an institutional hub that creates knowledge and skills necessary in promoting the socio-economic, political and cultural development of a nation. He further indicates that universities set objectives, which include among others to do research and train manpower based on the needs of society as characterized by the technological and industrial challenges that face the global economies. From Ondigi's perspective, it is evident that the university work is not only to give lectures but also to provide training to the local manpower and community. Hence, the baseline study is undertaken to serve the purpose that has been cited above.

Importantly, Ondigi undertook a descriptive survey on the system of university education and training in Kenya, the nature of their global programs, challenges experienced and influence on socio-economic, political and cultural development of communities. He targeted two sets of respondents namely the university lecturers and students in the public universities in Kenya. The findings from his study revealed that employers, particularly industrialists have expressed reservations on the type of graduates from Kenyan public universities as some have little knowledge on information technology. From this study, it is clear that the graduates from local universities do not produce relevant manpower hence the need for community service interventions to resuscitate competences and skills of in-service teachers, in the case of the present study, French language teachers. Moreover, the above study informs the present research on participants as practicing teachers constitute the market for the teaching practice students hence they can judge their performance on the bases of what they expect them to do when they go for internship program.

Moreover, Nuangchalerm and Chansirisira (2012:453) employ the action research in their study to develop community service through university roles by applying the philosophy of sufficiency economy of his Majesty the King Bhumibol Aduladej to fulfil villager's way of life. For their methodology, participatory learning, field trip and supervision were used for strategic plan. Data was collected using participatory observation method, questionnaires and interviewing. From their study, it is evident that the university is a significant part of social movement in terms of academic support and institutional generalization of theory through instructional practices. They argue that as the source of knowledge, university has the responsibility to employ both in [sic] theory and practical knowledge, implement into community in [sic] which surround university service area.

4.2 Community service in the context of the National University of Lesotho

In the context of the NUL, community service is mandatory and excludes any form of compulsion as none of the staff members are coerced to undertake it. However, it can be viewed as both the moral and personal obligation to contribute to knowledge sharing in one's area of expertise under the contract that the employee signs with the institution.

In brief, community service is not the new phenomena within the university communities across the world. It can take various forms depending on the needs of the

communities around the universities. It is one way in which the university plays its core function of contributing to the development of communities in their proximities. As a result, it is the obligatory role of the university members to undertake even though it can be viewed as an exercise of power by superiors depending on the context in which it is executed. Therefore, it is essential that the university community engage in the community service endeavors globally.

4.3 Theoretical framework

This study draws from the stakeholder theory which according to Bloisi (2007:570), it is about how a firm is managed and individuals who have a stake in the organization. He goes further to indicate that the theory consider the harm and benefits to different groups of people involved in the organization. This theory is relevant for this study because the community service project involves a number of stakeholders in the form of institutions, employees and the community (where the institution is located, beneficiary in this case teachers of French language and their learners) as they are affected by the project. However, for this particular paper, the framework is presented below as developed by the project coordinator.

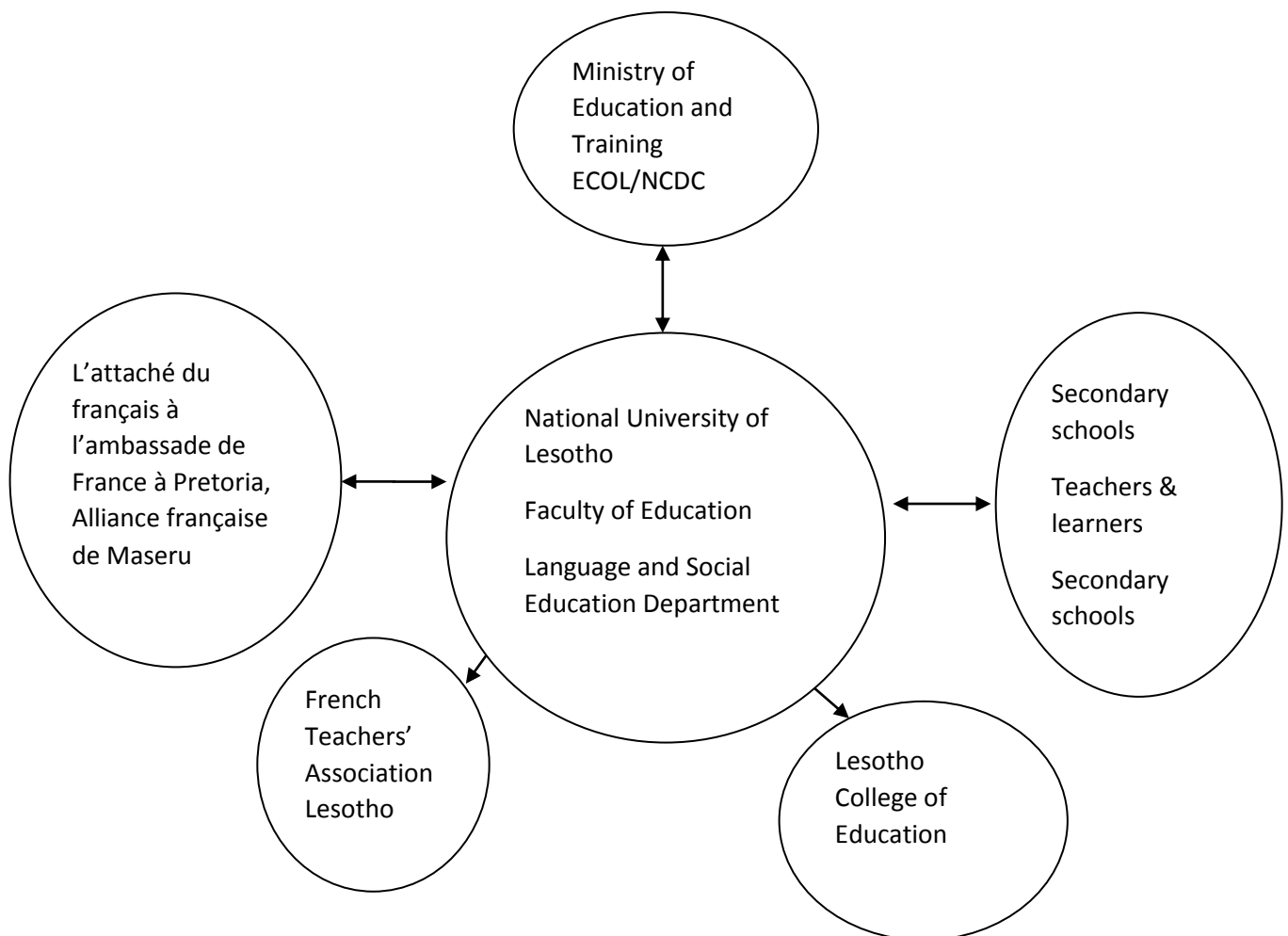


Figure 2.1: Stakeholder theoretical framework

4.4 Data collection

The focus group discussion was the tool used to collect data by recording presentations of five presenters that were representing the French Teachers' Association Lesotho (FTAL) and Maseru High School, Methodist High School, Lesotho College of Education, National University of Lesotho – Department of Language and Social Education (NUL-LASED), the Examination Council of Lesotho (ECOL) and National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) (the last two institutions were both representing the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) Lesotho, as the major stakeholder in the dispensation of French language in local secondary schools under the pilot project on the introduction of French in the mentioned establishments. In addition to the five presenters, there were three French language teachers participating in the group. It was during the first stakeholder meeting where the task team composed of four members was selected. The criterion for selection of respondents was the role of the participant within the institutions involved in French language education in Lesotho. As a result, the President of FTAL, the representative of the NUL, and two members from the Ministry of Education and Training were selected. The purpose of the team was to propose solutions to problems identified during the first stakeholder meeting on successes as well as the major challenges facing French language education in Lesotho and to envisage solutions.

5. Data presentation and analysis

A. Description of participating institutions

French Teachers' Association Lesotho (FTAL) is the association of French language teachers which was formed in 2010. The association gained a full momentum after it was officially registered with the Law office Lesotho in 2011. This body provides the forum for the Lesotho French language teachers to share their experiences, plan their work such as scheming, setting of end of year examinations as well as planning of the annual interschool events that is known as the French fair and the Francophone day in partnership with the Alliance française de Maseru. The events are graced by activities such as French music, poems composed by French language learners in secondary schools, quiz, drama and impromptu speech. (Source: Founder and Former President of FTAL)

Maseru High School is one of the low performing secondary school in which the current presidency of FTAL resides. The majority of learners in this school come from the underprivileged background. Again, a number of them have been rejected by the so-called well performing schools due to their weak academic performance.

Methodist High School is one of the best performing school in the Berea district. This school is characterized by good results and high pass rates. Learners in this school come from average families. Most students in this school have successfully transitioned from the primary schools to the secondary institutions.

Lesotho College of Education is the teacher training college that prepares both the primary and the secondary school teachers. The college offers the diploma qualification upon completion of studies by its students.

National University of Lesotho is the first and the ancient university in the country that offers a wide range of programmes from the certificate, diploma, degree and higher qualifications.

National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC) is the body within the Ministry of Education and Training that is responsible for the development of curriculum. There are various subject specialists that are entrusted to develop curriculum and syllabi for various subjects. On the other hand, the **Examination Council of Lesotho (ECOL)** is the examination council that is partially independent in the running of local examinations even though it is also partly answerable to the Ministry of Education as the assessment tools have to comply with the curriculum and assessment policy of the Ministry of Education and Training.

5.1 Views on the development of French language in Lesotho

Table 1: French Teachers' Association Lesotho

Challenges	Success	Envisaged solution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is one school that has only one French lesson per week. - In another, French is scheduled for three lessons per week. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ECOL is making efforts to respond to French teachers' long-term grievances on the level of examinations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NCDC should intervene in order to ensure equal allocation of periods for the teaching of French language.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assessing speaking with big classes. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training teachers on the application of the communicative approach.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Concerns with teaching practice students from NUL who were not ready to be observed. - Student-teachers did not use French language in school. - Student teacher portrayed unfamiliar conduct. - Concern that NUL continue to produce translators even though they do not get any work locally. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student teachers should speak French to motivate learners.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High examination fees for French. 		

Table 2: Lesotho College of Education

Challenges	Success	Envisaged solution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The college has not yet started producing teachers of French language. - The Language level of student joining the college is weak. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The college offers French as an additional course that is not examined. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The college should consider offering French language for primary school teachers.

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Table 3: National Curriculum Development Centre

Challenges	Success	Envisaged solution
- Lagging behind of French language teaching	- There are 19 schools teaching French.	- Recruitment of the French language subject specialist.
- Lack of authentic instructional material.		
- Schools that resist French language.		- French and Chinese are dominant international language therefore every Mosotho child must learn French since there are 26 African countries which have French as their official language.
- Professionalism and formality in handling French matters.		
- Every language area has to have n annual professional development program in the form of workshops, but French language has been left behind.		

Table 4: National University of Lesotho

Challenges	Success	Envisaged solution
- Due to financial constraints, it is not possible to organize the pre-teaching practice workshop for mentor teachers in secondary schools.		- Involve the French teachers' association at NUL in preparing debates and setting the speaking platform for French students at NUL campus.
- Inadequate credit hours for French-trainees at NUL.	- Faculty of Education managed to find placement for the student teachers specializing in French in various schools which offer French language.	
- Inadequate speaking lessons	- The Faculty of Education has sustained the program of teaching French from its inception to date.	

Table 5: Examination Council of Lesotho

Challenges	Success	Envisaged solution
- Phasing out of the old French syllabus.	- Moderation of examinations.	

6. Discussion

As it can be seen from table 1 above, the President of French Teachers' Association Lesotho has shed to light some problems that are confronting some schools that offer French language. Again, the issue of students-teacher ratio is a major concern that

impedes the effective teaching of the speaking component of the French language. These first concerns are mainly addressed to the Ministry of Education and Training through its representative, the NCDC as the institution that envisages the allocation of teaching hours per subject. However, three areas of concerns involve the National University of Lesotho as the institution responsible for training future French language educators for the country. As it can be seen, the cohort of the student-teachers that was placed in schools for the teaching practice program in 2016/2017 was not cooperative and disciplined as it may be expected by secondary school teaching practice tutors. (TPTs). This calls for more action from the French section of the Faculty of Education because it is the one accountable for teacher educators training and development in this area. Moreover, the demeanor depicted by student-teachers tarnishes the institution as well as the concerned course instructors.

Nonetheless, on the issue pertaining to the production of translators, this area does not fall within the parameters of the Faculty of Education. Colleagues from the Faculty of Humanities would be in the better position to address this concern as it affects their area of operation. Unfortunately, they were not able to participate in this study due to other Faculty obligations. Lastly, on the concern pertaining to the ECOL, the representative of French teachers indicated that fees for French examinations are high. This matter might affect the numbers of students opting for French language in the secondary schools due to escalating examination fees. However, it is important to note that French teachers appreciate the effort by the examination council to respond to some of their long-term grievance, which is a positive strand on the part of this institution.

Therefore, as it is shown in the proposed model on the stakeholder theory in figure 1 above, all the institutions are affected by the actions of one or more institutions as portrayed in the diagram. Consequently, collaboration and sharing of insights by all stakeholders can help in solving some of the eminent challenges that face these institutions. Moreover, the collaborative action will benefit the end users of the university product, who are learners of French language in Lesotho secondary schools as the student-teachers get employment in schools through the Teachers' Service Department of the Ministry of education. The above response cuts across the Ministry of Education as the overseer of teaching and assessment policies of the country through the National Curriculum Centre as well as the Examination Council of Lesotho; the National University of Lesotho and the Lesotho College of Education as the teacher training institutions, the secondary schools as the consumers of the university products and learners as clients to the schools offering French language.

In the case of the Lesotho College of Education, it is important to note that the college exposes students to French as the second international language to many who opt to study it. The gesture aligns the college education with that of institutions of higher learning in other countries where students are obliged to learn any other international language that they have never learnt before. Given the resource base of the college which is meager, this is a good initiative. However, learners in primary school

also need to be exposed to the French language so that they can be at ease with the subject when they get to the secondary school system.

However, from the National Curriculum Development Centre, there are many challenges that face French as the subject. The major debacle is the absence of the subject specialist for French language. This means that matters that are related to the French subject are either postponed or handed over to either Sesotho or English subjects specialists. This reality actually explains the three challenges outlined in table.3 because there is no proper coordination of French subject matters. This matter is serious as it involves issues of syllabus development, evaluation of appropriate learning materials and provision of training to the newly recruited French teachers. Unfortunately, there is no one to take care of matters pertaining to the teaching of French language hence the area even encounter issues of professionalism and formality as it is indicated in table 3. This says that French issues are taken lightly by the National Curriculum Development Centre and other stakeholders who are involved in the launching of the pilot project on the introduction of French in Lesotho secondary schools.

As it can be observed in table 4 above, the National University of Lesotho has encountered a number of challenges in relation to the teaching of French language. The respondent indicated earlier that the Faculty of Education only meets students who specialize in French language education from their third year of study until their final year. This says that for the first two years of their enrolment at the university, students who wish to pursue their studies in French Language Education have to begin their courses in the Faculty of Humanities for content acquisition.

Nonetheless, responses from both the teacher trainers and the receiving institutions during internship show that student-teachers go for internship program with some deficiencies particularly in terms of content. Hence they struggle to adequately pronounce themselves in French language. However, as for French lecturers in the Faculty of Humanities, have earlier stated their concerns for inadequate hours allocated for the learning of French by future French educators during the internal discussion about the quality of products the institution produces for the teaching sector.

Finally, concerning the last institution which is Examination Council of Lesotho, the main challenge regarding the assessment of French language is the phasing out of the old French syllabus. This finding presents an interesting issue of the dispensation of French lessons in schools regarding the phasing out of the old syllabus because the NCDC has not developed any new syllabus for French teaching in Lesotho secondary schools. Therefore, it is interesting to find undertake future research on how French teachers cope without the syllabus intended for the teaching of French language. Again, it is also important to unpack how assessment is harmonized with the content without the teaching syllabus. Nonetheless, the ECOL also has a milestone in the area of moderation because the participants indicated that the institution responded to the long-term request for the moderation of French examinations.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

From the results of the study, it is clear that there are three main challenges facing the teaching and assessment of French language. The main challenge is on using the communicative approach with large groups of learners, the role of French language acquired in secondary education in facilitating entry into the university system and the absence of the French language subject specialist in the Ministry of Education at its curriculum developing unit known as NCDC. To conclude, the study reveals that institutions which are stakeholders in the teaching of French language have both successes and challenges even though the latter outweigh the former. There are number of challenges which each individual stakeholder needs to reflect on in order to address them appropriately. It is important to note that obstacles in one institution affect the operations in another.

In as far as the National Curriculum Development Centre is concerned; the vacant post of the French subject specialist should be advertised and be occupied by the relevant candidate who would be in the position to attend to the French language matters at the Centre. Moreover, there should be dialogue between the centre and the French teachers in the country in order for the two stakeholders to suggest working solutions that could benefit the two parties.

It is recommended that the French lecturers in both the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Education should collaborate to help teacher trainees in content acquisition. This could be done through planning programs together and sharing expertise and advocate for common ways of supporting student-teachers by both faculties' staff involved in the offering of French courses required by students.

Information sharing between different stakeholder regarding matters that affect the teaching of French language is important. The phasing out of French syllabus has not been communicated to stakeholders in education such as the National University of Lesotho. Again, the question of who has decided to phase out the syllabus is still standing as well as the question of what is being used in schools for the purposes of teaching French in Lesotho secondary schools.

Moreover, in service teachers are encouraged to use the communicative approach in teaching French language to Basotho learners as this would help learners to be able to communicate in French both for the purposes of the examination and for functional purposes in their day to day live. On the other hand, training of the use of the communicative approach by both local teacher trainers and outside homologues is recommended as this lag is manifested in teachers' resistance to letting interns to apply this method during their teaching practice program.

Lastly, the study recommends that the Lesotho College of Education consider offering the teaching qualification in French language for primary school teachers as there are parents who might want their children to learn other languages apart from English and Sesotho from as early as primary school level.

7.1 Policy implications of the paper

The Government of Lesotho through the Ministry of Education and training need to closely monitor the educational reforms that they introduce within the country's educational system such as the introduction of French language in the national curriculum. The paper informs policy makers of the current situation facing the teaching of French language in Lesotho. It also communicates the challenges and successes experienced by various stakeholders hence appropriate interventions could be sourced in order to remedy the situation.

Moreover, the paper indicates that introducing new subjects into the curriculum need adequate monitoring and evaluation from concerned parties so that the subject do not become the burden to schools. Concrete Support frameworks should be in place in order to ensure the sustainability of the curriculum reform endeavors as they have implications to all stakeholders that are involved.

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